

# Access to Higher Education of 25 Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan Province, SW China

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## **Access to Higher Education of 25 Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan Province, SW China**

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**Abstract:** The level of development of higher education is an important indicator to measure the development of the social economy and the civilization of a region or country. In this article, we compare the distribution of the freshmen of ethnic minorities (EM) with the distribution of ethnic minorities over the population, based on a sample of 1,464 freshmen from 25 EMs of Yunnan Province in P.R. China. Although this analysis shows that access to HE is equal for some categories of EM students, it is still so that access to HE is harder for these minorities in comparison with freshmen from Han (major ethnic group comprising of 92% of the Chinese population) families.

**Key Words:** ethnic minority undergraduate; access to higher education; education equality

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## 云南省世居 25 个少数民族大学生获得高等教育机会的差异分析

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**摘 要：**高等教育的发展水平既是衡量一个地区、一个民族社会经济发展的重要指标，也是衡量一个民族和地区文明进步的标志。本研究基于云南省 25 个少数民族人口数（2003 年）和 2007 年云南省少数民族大学生 1604 份问卷调研数据，对少数民族大学生获得高等教育机会的进行了分析，得出了云南省 25 个少数民族接受高等教育机会基本相等、民族高等教育的发展与民族本身的发展息息相关等结论。

**关键词：**少数民族大学生 高等教育机会 教育公平

### 1. Introduction

Yunnan province in SW China is home to twenty five ethnic minorities (EMs), each with a population larger than 5,000. They make up 34% of the total population of the province. Before the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, most regions with

EMs were socially and economically less developed. Some had a feudal structure, others had characteristics of a society in which slavery was still present. For instance, daily events were recorded by marking them on wood or tying ropes. Modern education was not available. In 1952, students from ethnic minorities accounted for 0.29% in institutions of higher learning, 7.32% in middle schools, and 14.74% in primary schools (Editing Committee, 2003). At that moment the population of Yunnan province was composed of 6% EMs and 94% Han Chinese. Throughout the country, there was not a single formal institution of higher learning for EMs. Nevertheless, since the establishment of the Yunnan Ethnic College by the government on August 1, 1951, higher education (HE) for EMs in Yunnan Province made enormous progress (see figure 1).

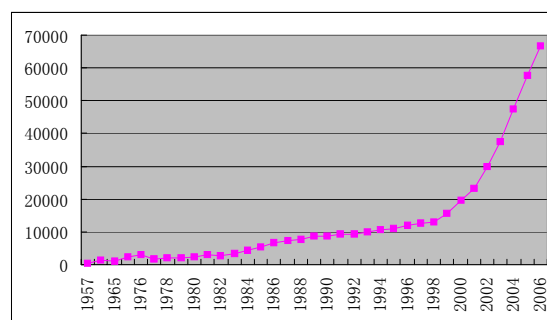


Figure 1 Number of EM students in Yunnan (1957-2006)(Zhang, 2008).

However, due to these historical setbacks, the education system for EM's is still less developed compared to that of the Han Chinese, in addition to the inequity between Han and EM's as far as access to higher education is concerned.

Equal access to education is an important part of educational democracy. Within a process of advancement of political democracy, equal access is the valuable pursuit and eternal ideal of education. The importance of this principle for the Chinese government is shown in the Constitution (The second session, 1999), the Law regarding Ethnic Regional Autonomy, and the Law regarding Compulsory Education of the PRC, in which clauses for supporting the development of education of EMs have been clearly stipulated. In 1999, the News Agency of the State Council of China issued a white paper titled "Chinese Ethnic Policy and Practice", saying: "ethnic equality and ethnic solidarity are fundamental and essential policies to solve ethnic problems". The Chinese constitution and related laws prescribe that the target is "to form ethnic equality, solidarity, harmony and a good social environment". Since many years Yunnan Province has been trying to provide each ethnic group equal

opportunities. In all kinds of news reports the following statements are made: “25 ethnic minorities with a population of over 5,000 persons in Yunnan have their own ethnic authors”, “25 EMs have their own cadres in leading positions on the provincial level” (Li Yajie and Liu Juan, 2004). Moreover, equal education opportunities became an important issue for thousands of families.

Since 1979 in China, with the enforcement of the birth control policy, parents are allowed to have only one child except EMs parents. So it is often stated that the number of students from EMs, who get access to higher education (HE), is increasing year by year. In the past, ethnic minorities had less chance to go to school, let alone university. In 1979-1980, 3.78% of the Chinese university students were members of one of the 55 EMs<sup>1</sup>. In 1990-2000 this figure has risen to 6.06% (James Jacob, 2006, 157), nationwide. Nevertheless, the percentage of EM students who get access to HE is still lower than that of the ethnic population in the whole country (Qin Hongxia, 2004). Although the population of EMs in Yunnan Province covered 33.41% of the population in 2000, ethnic minority students only consisted of 20.3% of the total population of Yunnan HEIs. In comparison to the proportion of ethnic students in the HEIs in 7 other provinces and regions, the percentage of the ethnic students in Yunnan Province ranks 7<sup>th</sup>, the last place among these seven provinces and regions (Tang Ying, 2003). In 2005, Dao Fudong and Hu Fawun (2005) calculated the access to HE of 25 EMs. They found that the educational development of these 25 EMs was slow, and that their access to HE was lower than for the other part of the population. Moreover, they regretted that the EMs had overall enjoyed less education than the rest of the Chinese population. Taking into account some characteristics of the regions, and the hierarchy and types of HEIs, Zhang Jianxin drew a purposeful sample of students in 10 HEIs in Yunnan Province in 2007. A questionnaire was sent to 2,400 students of which 2,315 responded (response rate = 96.5%). The 10 HEIs are Yunnan University, Kunming University of Science and Technology, Yunnan Normal University Business School, Yunnan Vocational College of Economic Management, Yunnan Normal University, Yunnan University for Nationalities, Yunnan Agricultural University, Kunming Medical College, Wenshan Normal College and Dali College. Among the 2,315 questionnaires that were filled out, 600 were filled out by students from ethnic minorities. These figures show that there is still inequality of access to HEIs for EMs in Yunnan. Moreover, we also found a difference in the enrolment opportunities in higher education for students whose parents belong to different social strata. Besides, compared with other studies, enrolment opportunities in higher education for students of different social strata is similar to those of other regions. Moreover, although the participation of children of lower social strata is

relatively high, these children attend weaker HEIs. One may expect that the government should take some measures to supply economic and cultural capital for children from these strata in order to create opportunities to register in the better HEIs. It should be stressed that this aid should not only be economic, but also cultural. P. Bourdieu (1986) has stressed that cultural capital is time-consuming and not easy to transfer. However, since cultural capital is important for creating more opportunities for students from the lower social strata, attention should be paid for offering more cultural capital to the lower social strata (Zhang Jianxin and Dong Yunchuan, 2007).

In line with the above, this article focuses mainly on the difference and disequilibrium of the access to HE between students of 25 EMs in Yunnan Province, although some comparisons will be made with Han students. The following questions will allow to enlighten part of the output of an egalitarian policy. This limitation should be held in mind while reading this article. Only part of the output of this policy will be investigated, since attention is paid solely to the equal and different access to HE of EMs. Indeed, an egalitarian policy is not only interested in reducing the inequality in access to HE among groups of EMs, but aims to reduce inequality of educational opportunities in all levels of education among all students, independently from the social background of the students. This includes the change of structures of the institutions and society in order to promote equality (Lynch, 2000). The following questions cover only the output of the educational system of the EMs in Yunnan province as it is determined by the distinct social structures in which these EMs live.

The main question is: Is the access of students to higher education for all EMs equal? In the next pages we will describe the data to answer this question. Secondly, we will investigate what kinds of differences exist between EMs as far as access to HE is concerned. We will focus on six questions:

- 1) Do all 25 EMs have equal access to HE?
- 2) Do rare and non-rare EMs<sup>2</sup> have equal access to HE?
- 3) Do rare EMs with small numbers and those with large numbers<sup>3</sup> have equal access to higher education?
- 4) Do cross-border EMs<sup>4</sup> and non-cross-border EMs have equal access to HE?
- 5) Do EM students born in ethnic autonomous prefectures and EM students born in non-ethnic autonomous prefectures have equal access to HE?

6) Do students from EMs of different regions have equal access to higher education?

We will finish with a conclusion.

## 2. Methodology

The data of this analysis are provided by the database of the “Survey concerning the Demand for HE of Ethnic Students in Yunnan Province”, which was carried out between September 25 and December 15 2007 in the following cities and ethnic autonomous prefectures governed by the EMs themselves in Yunnan Province: Kunming City, Pu’er City, Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, Wenshan Zhuang & Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture. According to the location of EMs and HEIs’ types, we sampled 1 key university: Yunnan University, one of the “Project 211”<sup>5</sup> universities, 3 public undergraduate universities (Yunnan Nationalities University, Dali College and Chuxiong Teachers’ College), 2 vocational colleges (Xishuangbanna Vocational College and Simao Teachers’ College) and 1 private college (Yunnan Normal University Business School). 1,604 questionnaires have been distributed and 1,475 copies have been collected. 1,464 questionnaires were valid (return rate = 91.96%) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Some characteristics of the students of 25 EMs in Yunnan Province

Variables	Categories	Persons	Percentage
Ethnic characteristics of parents	One of the parents is ethnic	554	38.4
	Both parents are ethnics	889	61.6
HEIs’ type	Advanced vocational colleges	533	37.1
	private colleges	149	10.4
	Public undergraduate universities	755	52.5
Family location (1)	Ethnic village	705	48.6
	Non-ethnic village	306	21.1
	County cities	354	24.4
	Provincial or municipal cities	86	5.9
Family location (2)	Yunnan Province	1377	95.3



	Other provinces	68	4.7
Characteristics	Rare EMs	624	42.8
	Non-rare EMs	833	57.2
population	Rare EMs with a small population	34	2.3
	Rare EMs with a large population	1423	97.2
Cross-border	Cross-border EMs	957	67.9
	Non cross-border EMs	452	32.1
Birthplace	Ethnic autonomous prefectures governed by the EM itself	983	71.4
	Non-ethnic autonomous prefectures	394	28.6
Ethnic mother tongue	Fluent	513	36.7
	Weak	280	20.0
	Ignorant	606	43.3

About half of the students of our sample attend a public undergraduate university, one third an advanced vocational college, and one tenth a private college. The parents of most of the students (95.3%) live in Yunnan Province, the rest live in other provinces. About 70% of these freshmen are born in ethnic autonomous prefectures; the others are born in non-ethnic autonomous prefectures. Approximately two thirds of the students lived among cross-border EMs, and the other part of the group among non-cross-border EMs. 42.8% belong to a rare EM, the others to a non-rare EM. Less than 3% are members of a rare EM with a small population, but the majority of the students are members of a rare EM with a large population. About half of the parents of these students (48.6%) live in an ethnic village<sup>6</sup>, 21.1% in a non-ethnic village; the remaining parents live in urban areas. Not all parents of our ethnic minority students have an ethnic background: of 1/3 of the families of our sample, only one of the parents has ethnic ancestry, but both parents of the largest group of our students have an ethnic minority background. Looking at the proficiency of students to speak their mother tongue it is clear that some change has taken place. Only one third of the students of our sample speak their mother tongue fluently, one fifth has some knowledge of their mother tongue, but cannot speak it fluently. About 43.3% of the students have no knowledge at all of the mother tongue of their parents.

### **3. Differences in access to HE among the different EMs in Yunnan Province**

Yunnan Province is located in the southwest of China, a beautiful place, famous for “South of Colorful Cloud”. In addition to Han people, who lived on this red-soiled plateau for generations since thousands of years, 25 EMs with a population of at least 5,000 persons live in this Chinese province. Table 2 classifies these 25 EMs according to the descending number of members of each EM (Dong Yunchuan & Zhang Jianxin, 2008, 10). We are interested in the possible differences between the access to HE

- 1) among 25 EMs of Yunnan Province;
- 2) among the rare and non-rare EMs;
- 3) among the rare EMs with a small population and rare EMs with a large population;
- 4) among the cross-border and non cross-border EMs;
- 5) among the EMs born in ethnic and non-ethnic autonomous prefectures, and
- 6) among the EMs from different types of regions.

#### **3.1. Access to HE of EMs first year students in Yunnan Province**

Our first question is focused on possible gaps between the different EMs concerning access to HE. We can find some answers to this question in table 2. Table 2 shows the proportions of the population of 25 EMs of Yunnan Province on 10,000 EM persons and the proportions of EM freshmen, also on a base of 10,000.

First, the figures show that the access rate to HE is not the same for all EMs. Some are more successful, others are less. In decreasing order the following 12 EMs send the largest proportion of freshmen to HE: Yi (3,418<sup>0</sup>/<sub>1000</sub>), Bai (1,667.8<sup>0</sup>/<sub>1000</sub>), Dai (741.2<sup>0</sup>/<sub>1000</sub>), Hani (672.6<sup>0</sup>/<sub>1000</sub>), Hui (652<sup>0</sup>/<sub>1000</sub>), Zhuang (590.3<sup>0</sup>/<sub>1000</sub>), Naxi (370.6<sup>0</sup>/<sub>1000</sub>), Miao (288.3<sup>0</sup>/<sub>1000</sub>), Lahu (274.5<sup>0</sup>/<sub>1000</sub>), Lisu (226.5<sup>0</sup>/<sub>1000</sub>), Man (123.5<sup>0</sup>/<sub>1000</sub>), Bulang (109.8<sup>0</sup>/<sub>1000</sub>), while the Han send 244<sup>0</sup>/<sub>1000</sub> to HE. This shows that 9 EMs attained a participation level in HE

higher than the Han (Yang Conglong, 2002). The proportion of EM freshmen who do not belong to former EMs is very small, not more than 5.35%.

Second, the (descending) rank order of the EM students with access to HE of Yunnan Province is for most EMs different from the (descending) rank order of EM population in Yunnan (see Table 2). Only the following 4 EMs match each other: Yi, Bai, Lahu and Pumi, while the other 19 EMs might differ 1 to 5 places. For instance, Wa ethnic minority ranks 10<sup>th</sup> according to their proportion among the EMs, but only ranks 15<sup>th</sup> according to the proportion of freshmen sent to HE.

Third, EMs send a larger or a smaller proportion of their youth to HE in comparison with the proportion they have among the EM population. About 10 EMs send a larger proportion of students to HE than the proportion of the EM among the 25 EMs. For instance, Yi, Bai, Hui, Naxi, etc. The most successful are students from the Bai who are with 1667.8 on 10,000 students, although the Bai are only 1056.5 on 10,000 among the EMs in Yunnan. Other EMs are less successful than could be expected if we take into account their proportion among the other EMs. The Hani EM is a good example. Hani freshmen number 372,3 out of 10,000 EMs freshmen. This is much less than could be expected from their proportion among the EMs (999.9 per 10,000)

Why do we find these differences as far as access to HE is concerned among the EMs? The ethnic students' opportunity to register in HE is most probably linked with the development of the society, culture and economics of the EMs. Zhang Shiya (1994: 26) puts it this way: "in fact, physical, social and mental demands always interlace together, which lead the action or guide to education."

In order to demonstrate more specific reasons for a more successful process of access to HE for EMs we focus on three EMs. Table 2 shows a big difference between the ethnic population distribution and the distribution of the Man and Naxi freshmen. The population of Man is 12,187 and ranks 24<sup>th</sup> among the 25 EMs, Man freshmen rank 11<sup>th</sup>, moving forward 13 places on the index of EM freshmen in HEI. Since the Qing Dynasty (A.D.1616-1911) Man's culture has advanced fast and plays an important role in Chinese political and economic development. Therefore, the demand for HE is stronger than among most EMs. In 2000, there were 1,522 Man EM students per 10,000 students, much higher than

the average number (201 students out of 10,000) of the whole province. The difference between the place (11<sup>th</sup>) of the Naxi EM among the other EMs in Yunnan Province and the place (7<sup>th</sup>) of the Naxi freshmen among the other EM freshmen is smaller than among the Man EM. This difference is probably a consequence of the change of the development of the ethnic culture, economics, transportation and other factors. Naxi EM mainly lives in Lijiang Naxi Autonomous County, a county that is famous for its tourism industry. About 1000 years ago, Naxi EM created a very rich cultural heritage. For instance, famous are the Dongba hieroglyphs and the Dongba script based on these hieroglyphs. Since December 1997 when the ancient Lijiang City has been awarded the title of “World Cultural Heritage Site” by the United Nations, the development of Naxi accelerated, and their wish for culture and demand for HE became much stronger than that of other EMs. In primary and secondary school all teaching is in Chinese, and although teachers were according to Hansen (1999: 64) rather critical about the proficiency in Chinese, the knowledge of Chinese is very important for having access to HE. In 2000, the statistics showed that there are 312 Naxi students out of 10,000, which is higher than the average of the whole province (201 persons out of 10,000), and also higher than that of Han Chinese (244 students out of 10,000). The Dai have even a higher proportion students in HE (741 persons out of 10,000) than the Naxi, although primary education is not for all Dai children in Chinese. Hansen (1999: 157) blames the language problem (Tai as home language and Chinese as medium of instruction) for the low percentage of Dai with a secondary and higher education. Since more Dai attend HE than Naxi, we wonder why this difference if the language teaching for Naxi is a better preparation for HE than the language teaching for the Dai. Other factors should be taken into account to explain this difference.

In order to improve the chances of the EM students regarding access to HE, the government launched an “extra score policy” in favor of the ethnic students taking part in the national HE exam<sup>7</sup> in Yunnan Province in 2007. This policy determined that the scores of “the ethnic examinees of 19 EMs with a population of at least 5,000 in Yunnan may be increased by 10 points to increase enrollment in HEIs, except for the students of Bai, Hui, Naxi, Yi, Zhuang, Man EMs and those from other provinces” (Yang Yueping, 2007). Most of our figures in table 2 support this policy. In table 2 we can see that the students of 5 of the 6 EMs who cannot take advantage of the “extra score policy” are those who have a better opportunity to access to HE than could be expected from their distribution among the EMs. Only the Zhuang has a smaller proportion of freshmen

among EM freshmen than the proportion of their population among the EMs.

Table 2. Proportional distribution of 25 EMs among all EMs in Yunnan Province and proportional distribution of EM freshmen in Yunnan Province (proportional parts of 10,000)

Ethnic Minorities	Population of the 25 EMs(2003)*		Freshmen of the 25 EMs (2007)	
	Rank order	0/000	Rank order	0/000
Yi	1	3301.9	1	3418.0
Bai	2	1056.5	2	1667.8
Hani	3	999.9	4	672.6
Zhuang	4	802.7	6	590.3
Dai	5	801.4	3	741.2
Miao	6	732.2	8	288.3
Hui	7	451.4	5	652.0
Lisu	8	427.9	10	226.5
Lahu	9	314.1	9	274.5
Wa	10	268.8	15	61.8
Naxi	11	207.3	7	370.6
Yao	12	133.7	16	61.8
Jingpo	13	91.4	19	34.3
Tibetan	14	90.1	13	82.4
Bulang	15	63.4	12	109.8
Buyi	16	38.4	17	54.9
Achang	17	23.5	22	20.6
Pumi	18	23.1	18	54.9
Mongolian	19	19.7	14	82.4
Nu	20	19.5	23	6.9
Jino	21	14.5	20	34.3
De'ang	22	12.5	25	0
Shui	23	8.8	21	34.3

Man	24	8.6	11	123.5
Dulong	25	4.1	24	6.9
Others		84.6		329.4
Total		10,000.0		10,000.0

\* Yunnan Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission and Yunnan Statistics Bureau. The statistical list of the 5<sup>th</sup> population census of ethnic population in Yunnan Province. Issued on 17 June 2003.

### 3.2 Difference between HE access of rare and non-rare EMs?

Yunnan is the province with the largest number of rare EMs in China. Among the 25 ethnic minorities in Yunnan, 80% of the population belong to 15 EMs (Bai, Hani, Dai, Lisu, Lahu, Wa, Naxi, Jingpo, Bulang, Achang, Pumi, Nu, Jino, De'ang and Dulong ) living in Yunnan Province, and are called rare EMs. The population of the 15 rare EMs is 6,167,812 while the population of the other 10 EMs is 7,963,019. That means that 44% of the EM population in Yunnan belongs to the rare EMs, and 56% to the non-rare. The percentage of EMs with access to HE in Yunnan who belonged to a rare EM was 42.8% and to a non-rare EM was 57.2%. The same proportions of students of rare and non-rare EMs have access to HE, as the proportions of rare and non-rare EMs that can be found in the EM population (see Figure 2 and 3).

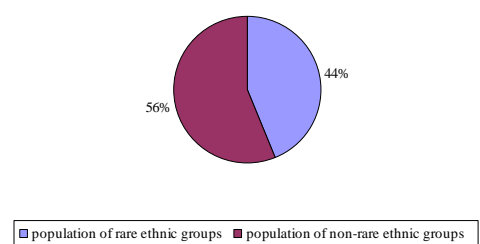


Figure 2 The population percentage of rare & non-rare EMs

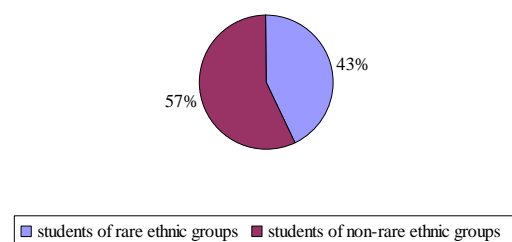


Figure 3 The population percentage of the students' access to HE from rare & non-rare EMs

### 3.3. Difference between HE access of rare EMs with a small population and rare EMs with a large population

The following 7 rare EMs have a small population: Bulang, Achang, Pumi, Nu, Jino, De'ang, and Dulong. The population of each of these EMs is smaller than 100,000 persons. The total number of the population of the 7 rare EMs with a small population is 228,941 (2%), and that of the other 18 rare EMs with a large population 13,901,890 (98%). Out of the EM freshmen, about 2.3% belong to the 7 rare EMs with a small population, and 97.7% belong to the 18 rare EMs with a large population. We can hardly speak about a difference here (see Figure 4 and 5).

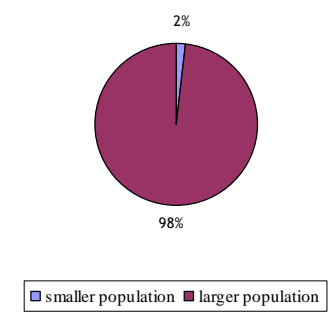


Figure 4 The population percentage of the rare EMs with a smaller population and that with a larger population

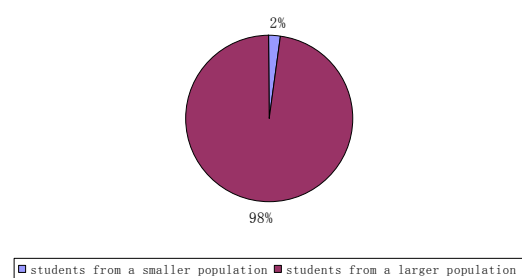


Figure 5 The population percentage of the students' access to HE from the rare EMs with a smaller population and that with a larger population

### 3.4. Difference between the access to HE of cross-border EMs and non cross-border EMs

Yunnan Province is a province situated in the border region of the South West of China, and has a very important strategic position. In the West, Yunnan borders on Myanmar, and in the South it borders on Laos and Vietnam. From the Dulong and Nu Autonomous County of Gongshan in the Dulong River regions in the far end of the North West wriggling to Tianpeng Region of Funing County in the far end of the South East, the total border is 4060 kilometers long. There are 27 border counties in the whole province. Due to historical developments, there are 16 EMs living on both sides of the frontier, but the villages and towns in both countries are closely connected. The 16 cross-border EMs are: Yi, Hani, Zhuang, Dai, Miao, Lisu, Lahu, Wa, Yao, Jingpo, Bulang, Buyi, Achang, Nu, De'ang, and Dulong. The population of these 16 cross-border EMs is 11,451,615 and that of the other 9 non cross-border EMs is 2,679,216, or respectively 81% and 19% of the EM population in Yunnan. Based on our sample we learned that 65.4% of the freshmen belong to 16 cross-border EMs and 30.9% to the 9 non cross-border EMs (3.8% did not answer). In an in-depth interview with some of the residents of the cross-border EMs, we were told that because of the “opening-up and attracting-in” policies of ASEAN, the exchange of economics, trade and culture is much more frequent than ever before. Therefore, the cross-border ethnic minorities make use of the increased opportunity to cross the border to study or trade in the adjacent countries. This could be the reason why the proportion of cross-border EM freshmen is relatively lower than the proportion of the cross-border EM population in the total EM population of Yunnan (see Figure 6 and 7).

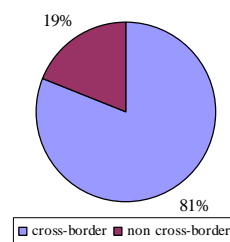


Figure 6 The population percentage of the cross-border and non cross-border EMs

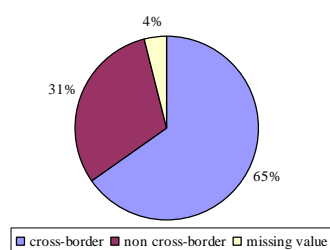




Figure 7 The population percentage of the students' access to HE from the cross-border and non cross-border EMs

### **3.5. Difference between access to HE for students born in ethnic and non-ethnic autonomous prefectures**

There are altogether 16 regions in Yunnan, among which 2 provincial cities, 7 regional cities and 8 ethnic autonomous prefectures in Yunnan Province. Article 12 of the Law on Regional Autonomy stipulates that: "Autonomous areas may be established where one or more minority nationalities live in concentrated communities, in the light of local conditions such as the relationship among the various nationalities and the level of economic development, and with due consideration for historical background." The autonomy of the ethnic regions is not just based on the population percentage. A region with a large population of ethnic minorities may be an autonomous prefecture, but this is also possible for a region with a small population of ethnic minorities. Moreover, not only regions with the most ethnic minorities can be autonomous, others can also be declared autonomous. Besides 8 non-ethnic autonomous prefectures, the 8 ethnic autonomous prefectures are: Xishuangbana Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Dehong Dai & Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Honghe Hani & Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Wenshan Zhuang & Miao Autonomous Prefecture and Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture. The students come from both types of prefectures. From our survey, we know that 71.4% of the freshmen are born in ethnic autonomous prefectures, and 28.6% in non-ethnic autonomous prefectures (see Figure 8). On the other hand, 58.56% of the EM population in Yunnan Province lives in ethnic autonomous prefectures and 41.44% lives in non-ethnic autonomous prefectures (Yang Wun, 2004: 41-42).. In comparison with the distribution of the EM population over Yunnan Province a larger proportion of freshmen is born in ethnic autonomous prefectures, than in non-ethnic regions. The locations where the EMs live, are relatively complex. The most typical characteristics are the clustered habitations, the individual housing system, and the fact that different EMs live together in the same area. Ethnic minorities live very scattered over the province. Most of their houses are built among those of the Han people. In the whole province, there is no county or city where only EMs live, neither does one EM solely live in one county or city. For example, the Yi has the largest population (4,470,000 people) and lives in Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture,

Honghe Hani & Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Ailao Mountain, Small Liangshan and some other counties. It is the same situation for the other EMs. Given these widely spread pattern of habitations, the higher participation level in ethnic autonomous prefectures, needs more research in detail. Indeed, it could be expected to find more freshmen in HE who grew up in regions where more inhabitants participate in the cultural mainstream.

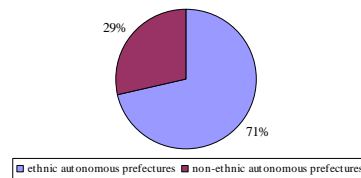


Figure 8 The population percentage of the students' access to HE born in ethnic and non-ethnic autonomous prefectures

### 3.6. Difference in access to HE between EM students living in different types of regions

In table 1 we learned that 48.6% of the parents of the freshmen of our sample lives in ethnic villages, 21.1% in non-ethnic villages, 24.4% in county cities, and 5.9% in provincial and municipal cities. 69.7% of the students is from ethnic and non-ethnic villages. This situation is very similar to the living situation of the ethnic population in Yunnan. EMs in Yunnan Province live in villages together with other people; they live in border areas and in mountainous regions that are characterized by their typical vertical locations. The clustering place for each ethnic minority is the village, and some villages are also co-habited by 2 or 3 EMs (see Figure 9).

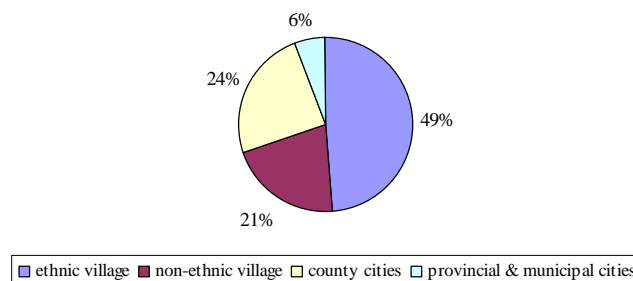


Figure 9 The percentage of the ethnic students' access to HE living in different regions

Table 1 shows that EMs with the highest participation in HE are residents of an ethnic area.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This analysis of the access to HE of EM youth in Yunnan Province suggests the following conclusions.

First, because of the increasing social development and economic modernization, members of 25 EMs in Yunnan Province have become aware of the importance of HE. Moreover, participation in HE contributes to self-development and ethnic development. It has a positive effect on the total ethnic population. A good example of this can be found among the Man and Naxi who have a higher percentage of freshmen than could be expected from their distribution among the other EMs.

Second, besides the factors mentioned in section 3.1 that have stimulated the access to HE of Man and Naxi, attention should be paid to language education. Indeed, we agree with Wang Tiezhi (2007: 155) who states: "From a cultural perspective, the most prominent determinant affecting ethnic minority educational development is language." He shows how De'ang (who have no written language) youth have problems to learn Chinese. Nevertheless, in the beginning they demonstrate equal competence in Chinese and mathematics as their Han classmates. Later on their competence diminishes, what makes it difficult to compete with others to enter HE, which is visible in Table 2 (See also James Jacob, 2006: 165 and Hansen, 1999), .

Third, although there has been a policy to create more equality of opportunities for HE there is still a difference between the proportions of students of the different EMs registering in HEI. On the other hand, the figures of Table 2 indicate also that some EMs are overrepresented in HE, some have a share of HE population similar to their share in the population, and others are underrepresented. Like we did for Man and Naxi, it would be valuable for education policy to analyse more in detail the reasons of these differences in order to find out what policy could diminish the differences between the different EMs and the Han.

Fourth, among some categories of EMs there was no difference of access to HE in 2007. This was so for the rare and non-rare EMs as well as for the rare EMs with a small population and the rare EMs with a large population. The proportion of freshmen in each category was the same as the proportion of each category in the EM population. Given this

conclusion, it could be questioned whether in function of HE policy the differences between rare and non-rare, and between the rare EMs with a small population and the rare EMs with a large population are important. Nevertheless, a follow-up of this phenomenon is advisable because situations might change.

Fifth, access to HE among cross-border EMs was lower than among non-cross-border EMs. Some local interviewees suggested that this was the consequence of the multiple contacts of the cross-border EMs among each other, also with those from the other side of the border. This could create more possibilities for these youth to attend HE outside Yunnan Province. Because our data do not give a clear answer on the question why access to HE among cross-border EMs was lower than among non-cross-border EMs, new research could be very informative. First, it should be investigated whether and why cross-border EM youth do indeed continue their education outside China. And second, if it is so, it is important to know why some cross-border EM youth study in Yunnan and others do so outside the country.

Sixth, about 7 out of 10 EM freshmen are born in ethnic or non-ethnic villages, and these villages are situated in ethnic or non-ethnic autonomous prefectures. In order to reveal whether this general pattern is retraceable for each EM, a more in depth analysis of the data is needed. Approximately the same proportion is born in ethnic autonomous prefectures. This situation does not match with the situation of the EMs in Yunnan Province. 58.56% of the EMs lives in ethnic autonomous prefectures. More research is needed to find out why a larger proportion of freshmen is found in ethnic autonomous prefectures than could be expected from the distribution from the EM population over the ethnic or non-ethnic prefectures

This survey has shown that HE development and ethnic development go close together. Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, ethnic HE in Yunnan Province is developing fast. Some EMs attained a participation level to HE as high as the Han. This was so for Bai, Hui, Naxi, Yi, Zhuang, Man EM and others. But for most of the EMs the HE development is still lagging behind others, let alone the access to HE by Han students. Therefore, the ethnic HE development in Yunnan Province has still a long and hard road to go. We can only expect that policy makers will find appropriate instruments to create more equal opportunities for access to HE for EMs in Yunnan, and in all China.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> There are 55 ethnic minorities in Yunnan Province, and 25 of them have a population larger than 5,000.

<sup>2</sup> Rare EMs refer to EMs, living mainly in Yunnan province and whose population in China resides for more than 80% in this province. There are 15 rare EMs in Yunnan.

<sup>3</sup> Rare EMs with small numbers refers to the rare EMs whose population is below 100,000 in Yunnan Province. There are 7 rare EMs with small numbers (Bulang, Achang, Pumi, Nu, Jino, De'ang, and Dulong) while the other 8 are rare EMs with large numbers.

<sup>4</sup> "Cross-border EMs" are the ethnic minorities (EMs) who live on the national boundaries of different countries; "non cross-border EMs" are ethnic minorities that live only in China. Since Yunnan Province neighbors with Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam, 16 EMs live across the national borders.

<sup>5</sup> "Key university" refers to the universities of "Project 211" which is the Chinese government's new endeavor aimed at strengthening about 100 institutions of higher education and key disciplinary areas as a national priority for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in China.

<sup>6</sup> "Ethnic villages" are villages mainly composed EMs; "non-ethnic village" are villages mainly composed of non-EMs.

<sup>7</sup> In China, each year in July (now in June) HEIs enroll students according to their score in the national HE entrance exam. In order to encourage the EM students' access to HE, Chinese government issued an "extra score policy" to the EMs' examinees who take part in the national HE exam in July.

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